THE HOUND OF CALGARY

by Z. M. Hamilton

In 1901, when I was very young, probably for my sins, I was editing the Herald in Calgary. The Herald was then the only daily between Winnipeg and Vancouver and believe me I was puffed up with my own importance.

Calgary, at that time, was the ranching metropolis of Western Canada and it was such a place as now only can be seen upon the pictured screen. The wooden sidewalks still rang to the belled spurs of the range riders and most people went about their occasions on horseback. The Indians to be seen on the streets were the tall and independent Blackfeet, who, in the old days, were considered the aristocrats of the native people. The place was an important detachment of the North West Mounted Police and some of the officers and men who had made history in the old days sojourned there.

The Herald Office was situated close to the Bank of Montreal, just across Eighth Avenue, or "Stephen Avenue" as it was then called, from the Alberta Hotel which had the reputation of providing the best entertainment for travellers in all the wide and windy West. The Alberta was a great gathering place for the worthies of the region, and in an afternoon those who gathered in the rotunda often included among their numbers some remarkable and picturesque characters.

They were fine forthright people, most of them with the weather of the prairie winds and the tan of the prairie sun upon their faces, and with many a stalwart

leg bowed by the saddle. A book could be written about these men, many of whom were making western history and my pen lingers about the subject. However, I started to tell a story about a dog that made local history of a sort in Calgary and I must leave these Alberta worthies for another chapter.

At that time, my wife and I had "hung our crane" in a comfortable little house built for us by Thomas Underwood on a side street off First Street West on the way to the Roman Catholic Church.

On New Year's Day, 1902, a messenger arrived at our domicile in great haste bearing a note from Bob Edwards. It intimated that he was lying seriously ill at "Irish's", a well-known hostelry at the outskirts of Calgary down by the Elbow River, and that he would like to see me forthwith either to help him in drawing his will or to receive his benediction, e'er he left this distressful vale of tears. I lost no time in obeying the summons because Bob was not only an old friend but I had known his people in Scotland.

When I arrived at Irish's I found ~~him~~ Bob very much alive--as a matter of fact I had never seen him look better. He was engaged in promoting horse races among a bunch of Blackfoot Indians, and a rifle shooting match among some Calgary sportsmen. I expressed my delight at seeing him looking so well and asked him the reason of his note. He said, with an airy sweep of his hand,

"I thought it would fix things with the wife so that you could get away."

My attention was attracted by an immense hound that was stalking in a dignified manner at the heels of one of the contestants in the rifle match. He was a great tawny brute built for speed and battle and, when I attempted to stroke him, he curled back his lips from his teeth and uttered a low and menacing growl.

If I remember correctly his owner had put him up as a prize for the rifle match and I wondered why he had been willing to part with such a splendid-looking brute. I learned afterwards that the dog was pretty nearly a pure-bred Irish Wolfhound, a descendent of that ferocious breed that was imported from Hibernia to the amphitheatre at Rome to contend with lions and tigers and the other wild beasts used for a Roman spectacle. His name was "Smoker" and from my subsequent experience with him, I was very sorry for the lions and other things with which his ancestors did battle.

Anyway I won him in the match and when his owner transferred the leash to my hands, he said,

"Treat him rightly and he will be a good friend to you."

When I led him into the house that evening, my wife said,

"Good Heavens, where did you get that awful-looking brute?"

I explained that he was a dog of mettle and a splendid watch dog, and we would have lots of fun hunting wolves and coyotes with him. We gave him supper and he

seemed quite friendly. Later we made a bed for him in the shed.

The following day we took him out for a walk and he stuck quite close to our heels and behaved very well, but I noticed that every dog we met, when they caught sight of him, slunk away as if terrified of their lives.

There was a young lady staying with us at the time, a friend of my wife, who was convalescing from rather a serious illness. Two or three days later, my wife was preparing her breakfast to serve to her in bed. She had placed bacon and eggs and other things on a tray on the table and, on leaving the dining room for a moment, came back to find Smoker consuming with gusto the breakfast she had prepared for the invalid. He was so tall that he stood almost level with the table. She was so irritated that she gave him a couple of hard slaps with her hand and spoke to him harshly. She declared that he carefully used the table cloth to wipe from his mouth the remains of the eggs and then baring his teeth, seized her by the ankle. He did not attempt to bite her, but just held her there. She disengaged herself and then ushered him into the shed where she kept him locked up until my return. I told her that he was probably just playful, but she said he had anything but a playful look.

However, he seemed to have entirely regained his good humour, and the following day when I came home my wife was getting dinner ready. She went into the pantry and discovered Smoker standing beside a shelf and polishing off the cold roast that was to provide our meal. I walked

into the pantry and bestowed a good hard kick on his posterior. He turned on me and gave the fiercest growl I ever heard and attempted to seize my leg. I felt it was now or never if I were to maintain my supremacy in my own household. I had a Boer sjambok made of rhinoceros hide and loaded with lead. I picked it up and hit him one blow with it. He reared up on his hind legs and tried to seize it from my hands. I opened the door to the shed and propelled him in that direction. When his head was through, I shut the door so that he could not turn on me again and administered to his rear quarters a proper beating. Then I relaxed the pressure and propelled him through. The row he made was something sinful during this brief scuffle. It sounded like a pit full of wild beasts. Strange to relate when I ventured to open the door to go into his lair he seemed to have recovered his good humour, and actually came forward to lick my hand.

After that he became quite devoted to us and whatever he might do to outsiders, was as gentle as a lamb with my wife and myself. If I were late at a Council meeting, or anything else that I had to attend in a reportorial capacity, my wife would go to bed and the great dog would lie down on the floor beside her. If it were late, and he could hear footsteps coming up the sidewalk, he would raise his head and listen attentively. If the footsteps left the main sidewalk and came in the direction of the house, he would rise up and go to the front door and place his nose close to it with the hackles rising on his neck and

omitting low and menacing growls. When the footsteps passed he would return and take up his position by my wife's bedside. He apparently distinguished my footsteps, for when he heard them in the distance, he would smile in a canine manner and thump the floor with his tail.

For a while "all was quiet on the western front" and Smoker was quite a well-behaved member of our household. My wife had been sick and after a short sojourn at the Holy Cross Hospital returned home, and Smoker seemed delighted to see her. It was a day in early Spring - still slushy underfoot. The sun was getting strong. My wife and I were sitting on the veranda with Smoker lying beside us. A rancher with a sturdy team and a buckboard, apparently on his way out of town, turned down our street. Right opposite our door his horses shied at a piece of paper and the driver applied the whip to them. This seemed to infuriate Smoker, for he rose to his feet with the easy co-ordination of a cat and with one single bound from the veranda cleared the front fence and in a series of galloping motions approached the vehicle. The driver occupied with his horses, a team of spirited young animals, did not observe Smoker until he made an attempt to board the buckboard. The man cut at him with his whip, but little things like that did not dismay our dog. He made a leap for the driver but missed him and then turned his attention to the vehicle. He seized the hind wheel in his powerful teeth and actually stopped it from turning. I was out after him as fast as I could, and seized him by the collar, and managed to drag him away.

The rancher enquired what the "so and so" I meant by harbouring such a dangerous wild beast around the premises and eventually drove off cursing deeply.

I knew too much to beat Smoker myself, but again I banished him to the shed.

That Spring, Smoker had an adventure that was regarded as an epic among Calgary Sportsmen. John R. Thompson, a very dignified elderly gentleman, known to everyone as "wall-eyed" Thompson owing to the loss of one of his optics, was the Dominion Homestead Inspector at the time and, in the course of his duties, had to traverse a large portion of Southern Alberta in a buggy behind a team of excellent horses. He was quite a horse and dog man himself and owned some very fancy Hackneys of the strain of the famous Robin Adair. Wherever he went he was followed by a pack of graceful greyhounds that were the most inoffensive animals in the world.

At the time of which I speak, he had recently imported a handsome greyhound bitch, and he intended to take her with him on his next trip to accustom her to the prairie sights and sounds. It occurred to him that the greyhound, green as she was in the country, might get into some trouble with wolves or coyotes, and he asked me if I would loan him Smoker to be a sort of guard for her, putting up the argument that in any case a long journey across the prairie might work off some of my pet's superfluous energy.

Thompson was an experienced dog man and Smoker took to him at once so I allowed him to take the dog with him on the journey. He was going to Cardston, the Mormon

settlement in the south country and when he was crossing the Blood Reserve he sighted a big buffalo wolf not far from the Cutbanks. The greyhound saw it and stretching away at a fast and graceful gallop, started in its direction. Smoker who was slouching along the trail hunting an occasional gopher had neither noticed the wolf nor the departure of the greyhound.

Thompson figured ~~that~~ that was the end of his dog when he saw her disappear from sight over the ridge, but calling to Smoker he turned his horses out on ~~to~~ the prairie and put the whip to them. As they topped the ridge, Smoker saw the greyhound and the wolf rapidly approaching each other, ~~and he~~ took up the chase in a most business-like manner and they all disappeared among the hills.

When Thompson eventually reached the scene the first thing he saw was the body of the greyhound completely dead. A few paces further on, he found the wolf / panther dead and Smoker rolling himself in a little patch of snow that had remained over from winter and getting the wolf's fur out of his teeth. This was supposed to be the only authentic instance in Alberta of one dog single handed killing a big buffalo wolf. That was how Thompson told the story anyway and he had the evidence of the dead greyhound and the undamaged Smoker to bear out the story. His idea was that Smoker had arrived at the scene when the wolf was tangling with the greyhound, and Smoker had just killed him out of hand.

After her sojourn in the hospital my wife was long in recovering and she needed some help in the house. Female help was almost impossible to obtain and we made arrangements with our Chinese laundryman to hire his cousin, or nephew, or some relative recently arrived from the Orient. He brought the lad to the house one evening while we were sitting on the veranda with Smoker lying along side and we made a deal for the young fellow's services.

The Chinaman admired the dog and bent and patted his head and said, "Good Doggie, Good Doggie"--an attention that Smoker did not seem to resent. We gave the Chinaman the key to the back door and gave him instructions about preparing breakfast in the morning, and my wife said,

"Before you come in be sure and speak to the dog."

The Chinaman said, "All right, I like nice doggie."

But the Oriental forgot these instructions and we were awakened about 7 o'clock the following morning with the most fearful noise, and when I got to the back door, I found the Chinaman scaling at great speed a picket fence that separated our property from some school grounds, and the dog in the act of tearing to pieces the somewhat voluminous garments of the fugitive. By the time I had Smoker under control, the Chinaman disappeared, and like the wayfarer in John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" we saw him no more.

A few days elapsed and my wife was still in poor health. We looked around for some other domestic help

and the only thing we could find was another Chinaman. My brother at that time was staying with us and, when the second Chinaman was to arrive in the morning, he undertook to get up and let the Chinaman in, and introduce him to the dog. Again there was another fearful commotion, and when we got up we found my brother chaining Smoker up and the Chinaman sitting weeping in the kitchen, bleeding like a blood donor and reiterating plaintively,

"The dog, he bit me, the dog he bit me."

We had to take the second Chinaman to the hospital and bear the expenses of his treatment, and considered ourselves lucky for not being sued for damages.

My wife said to me, "If you don't do something about that dog, I will shoot him myself." She made motions towards the army rifle that I had, by virtue of my service in the C.M.R.

I chained him up for the day and when I came home after a hard day's work it was still a bone of contention between my wife and myself. It began to seem that my domestic felicity was being greatly impaired.

However, we were visited that night by a friend named Crofton, a sporting Irishman who had a ranch near Shepherd and professed to be an authority upon horses and dogs. He suggested that he should take Smoker out to the ranch where he would be able to run off some of his superfluous energy chasing wolves and other such things. We readily agreed to the plan. Crofton had a stable in town and he said he would chain up the dog there until he went out to the ranch in a couple of days. So that night I went down with him and chained

him up in one of Crofton's stalls. He seemed to be quite docile.

We had been planning ~~for~~ a short holiday at Banff for some weeks but we had not been able to make it, because we could neither take Smoker with us nor leave him at home, and now that our minds were free of him we decided to proceed to Banff.

We had a good time, fished for trout in the Echo River and were enjoying ourselves immensely when we received a telegram from Crofton marked "urgent".

It said: "For God's sake come home. Smoker is loose in stable and horse has not been fed for days."

We sadly returned to Calgary and on going to Crofton's stable, the dog greeted us with every demonstration of affection.

By this time my wife was beginning to lose her patience. She blamed me for the loss of the Chinaman, the mean behavior of the dog and all the trouble that the dog had got us into.

She told me the following morning that she was going to "get on the tub" herself to take care of an accumulated washing. She was not sufficiently recovered from her illness to undertake a job of that nature, and of course I was worried. The following morning I got up very early and went over to the Langevin Bridge near where there was a small foreign settlement springing up across the Bow River, ~~in the hope of intercepting~~ I hoped to intercept a scrub woman on her way to work and ~~bribing~~ bribe her to come and work for us for the day.

Presently a splendid looking creature dressed in foreign looking raiment came walking across the bridge. She was of large and ample proportions and among other adornment wore a magnificent amber necklace. She had not much English and I said,

"You go to work?"

"Yes".

I said,

"I will give you two dollars to come with me."

She shook her head, "Not enough".

I "sweetened the pot" with another dollar but still she shook her head, but when in desperation I added another dollar and showed her the money she said,

"All right, I go with you."

I conducted her to the house and found that my wife had already started washing. She looked at the woman I had brought with some astonishment and said,

"What on earth have you got there?"

I said, "I have brought a work lady for you."

As soon as the woman saw my wife she shied away from the door and said,

"You no want me; you have another woman." She showed signs of distaste.

My wife said to me, "Have you paid her?"

I said, "Yes."

She then turned to the woman who said, "I no wash, I no scrub, I no work."

By this time I had propelled her into the house

and my wife showed her the tubs. She viewed the pile of dirty clothes with a great deal of aversion.

"All right", said my wife, "if you have never worked before you are going to do it now. Remove some of those gaudy clothes and get busy and earn the money."

When I left for the office, leading Smoker, she was up to her elbows in soap suds.

I did my work at the Herald usually seated at a large desk with an aperture beneath it, into which I projected Smoker, and when he attempted to come out I would give him a poke with my feet. I took him back at lunch time and the day passed in a fairly uneventful manner.

When 5 o'clock came and the paper was on the press, there was usually a period of relaxation when Calgary citizens would come into the office and discuss the news of the day. When everything was all set I relaxed somewhat and filling my pipe walked into the outer office to join the people there, forgetting for the moment all about Smoker.

Among those present was W.H. Heald, a well-known Calgary sportsman, accompanied by a beautiful Irish setter that was the very apple of his eye. There was a sort of desultory conversation going on when I heard Heald say, "Merciful Heavens, where did that great savage brute come from?"

There was Smoker coming in the door with the hackles on his neck standing up and with his eyes upon Heald's setter. Before anybody could say a word, he threw himself upon the setter and instantly there was pandemonium. The crowd scattered, some of them taking refuge on tables and desks, and one old gentleman tried to climb up the door. A bookcase fell

down and there was a most fearful racket. Out of the din I could hear Heald's voice say,

"If your dog kills mine, I will shoot you, so help me Heaven!"

Into the midst of this tumult came George Hope Johnstone, a tall athletic Scotchman who had been Colonel Sam Steele's assistant on the Beaver during the wild days of the C.P.R. construction in the mountains. He picked up, as if it had been a feather, a large office chair and swinging it around his head put Smoker out of business. Instantly there was an awed silence. Smoker lay stretched out as if dead. An elderly gentleman, who had perched himself on a shelf, came down and for a moment nobody said a word. Heald picked up his setter, which was more frightened than hurt, and went out of the door abusing me in a very shameful manner and declaring that if it had not been for George Hope Johnstone he would have shot me for being in possession of such a dangerous brute.

We all looked at Smoker's body nearly filling ~~about~~ one-half the space in the office and Mr. Tomlinson, the business manager in the office, said,

"Well I guess that is the end of your troubles with that dog, but you had better remove his carcass from here."

With the assistance of Mr. Johnstone, I dragged him into my own office where he lay apparently as bereft of life as the dead in Deuteronomy.

Just then I heard the Herald presses start and in a few minutes the newsboys came bolting out to get their

newspapers on the street. The first boy out stumbled over Smoker's form. Suddenly, the dog came back to life. He leapt upon the boy who fled screaming into the street and Smoker proceeded to tear the papers left behind into shreds. In a few minutes he seemed to be as well as ever and as ready for battle and trouble.

Very discouraged, I snapped the chain into his collar and proceeded to lead him home. At the Alberta corner I met Captain Grant Gordon who stopped and addressed me.

"By Jove, he said, that is a magnificent looking hound you have there."

"Yes", I replied, "he is a dog of great mettle and many accomplishments."

"Do you think he could kill wolves?" said the Captain.

"Just show him a wolf," I answered.

"You know," he said, "I have been bothered with wolves on my range for a long time."

Then he continued, hesitatingly because he was one of the most polite men in the world,

"I suppose you would not loan him to me."

I brightened with hope and said, "Well, Captain Gordon, I would not let anybody else have him but seeing that it is you and that these wolves are bothering you so badly, I will let you have him."

"Oh, that is so good of you," said the Captain.

I ventured to ask him when he was returning to his ranch. He replied, "I am just going to Johnny Hamilton's livery stable to hitch up."

I said, "I will go with you and you can take the dog right along."

When his team was hitched up I chained Smoker to the hind axle, after receiving profound thanks from Captain Gordon. I had a qualm of conscience and said, "Captain Gordon, after Smoker has disposed of all the wolves on your range, you had better be a little careful of him in case he starts on your cowboys or any other live things that may be about your place."

He said, "That will be all right."

I watched him drive off with the dog following on a slack of his chain as if he had been a trained carriage dog.

We left Calgary shortly afterwards and I never saw Smoker again, but I did hear that the wolves in a body left Captain Gordon's range after Smoker put in an appearance.

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By - Z. M. Hamilton.